



Aethiopica 10 (2007)

International Journal of Ethiopian and
Eritrean Studies

SIMONE TARSITANI

Dissertation abstract

I rituali musicali dello zikri a Harar, Etiopia

Dissertation in the Dipartimento di Studi Glottoantropologici e Discipline Musicali,
Università di Roma “La Sapienza”, defended on 5 May 2006 to obtain a Ph.D. in Storia e
analisi delle culture musicali

Aethiopica 10 (2007), 302–303

ISSN: 1430–1938

Published by

Universität Hamburg

Asien Afrika Institut, Abteilung Afrikanistik und Äthiopistik

Hiob Ludolf Zentrum für Äthiopistik

aspects of the encounter and conflict between the two Christian Churches, the Ethiopian and the Catholic. The Jesuits tried to develop an Ethiopian Catholic culture, and to that end they preached their sermons, held debates, argued with Ethiopian clergy, and translated texts into Gē'Āz and Amharic.

The study concludes that the main cause of failure of Catholicism in Ethiopia was the Jesuit missionaries' attempt to create a religious system which would be homogeneous in terms of creed and theology as well as in terms of rituals. As in the case of Catholic Reformation in Europe, the Jesuits wished to sacrifice the local religious expressions for the benefit of a uniform homogeneous religion.

SIMONE TARSITANI, *I rituali musicali dello zikri a Harar, Etiopia*, Dissertation in the Dipartimento di Studi Glottoantropologici e Discipline Musicali, Università di Roma "La Sapienza", defended on 5 May 2006 to obtain a Ph.D. in Storia e analisi delle culture musicali.

The thesis "I rituali musicali dello *zikri* a Harar, Etiopia" illustrates historical and cultural background, ritual context and musical analysis of *zikri* rituals in Harar, Eastern Ethiopia.

Zikri is the Harari equivalent to *dhikr*, but in Harar the term refers not only to the various forms of ritual recitation and their ceremonial context, but also to the individual devotional songs performed during the *zikri* rituals. Among the ceremonial traditions developed by Ethiopian Muslims, *zikri* is quite a significant one, developed in the city that has been for centuries the main centre of Islam in East Africa.

This ethnomusicological work is based on extensive fieldwork carried out in Harar between 2000 and 2004. The overall material collected (part of which is stored at the Archivi di Etnomusicologia of Accademia di Santa Cecilia) amounts to approximately 140 hours of audio recordings, 100 hours of digital video, photos and digitized written documents.

The first volume of the thesis is articulated in three chapters followed by a chapter of concluding reflections. The first chapter defines the subject in the frame of Islamic doctrine and its ritual tradition, describing the repertoire of religious hymns – named *zikri* – and the liturgical texts commonly adopted in Harari religious practice. In the second chapter, after a review of the history of Islam in Harar and considerations on the importance of the cult of saints in the region, the most important gathering places and the major ritual occasions are illustrated. The core of this study consists in the systematic analysis of the religious songs displayed in the third chapter. A selected sample of texts, melodies and rhythmic accompaniments is de-

Dissertation abstract

scribed, elucidating the systematic and peculiar features of the *zikri* tradition in Harar. The concluding chapter proposes some reflections on the social and cultural values of *zikri* rituals, especially considering recent historical changes.

The second volume is an appendix and contains photographs, transliteration and translation of a selection of *zikri* texts, interviews quoted in the thesis, a list of the melodies transcribed for analysis and a selection of complete musical scores of *zikri* songs (transliterated text, melody and rhythmic accompaniment). Attached to the volume is an audio CD containing the musical examples examined in the thesis and a video DVD with a montage of four *zikri* ritual occasions in Harar.